

LORA TOOMBS SCOTT

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

AFRO-AMERICANS IN SAN FRANCISCO  
PRIOR TO WORLD WAR II

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The San Francisco African-American Historical and Cultural Society

Project Coordinator: Lynn Bonfield

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INTERVIEW WITH MRS. LORA TOOMBS SCOTT

AUGUST 23, 1978

At Mrs. Scott's home, 361 Alcatraz Avenue, North Oakland.

Interviewer: Jesse J. Warr, III

Transcriber: Mary Wells

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BEGIN TAPE 1:4:1 (FIRST SESSION - AUGUST 23, 1978)

JW: Your birthplace and birthdate?

LS: San Jose, California. June 4, 1895.

JW: You were born at home?

LS: Yes. People didn't go to hospitals at that time.

JW: Were there any stories communicated to you [concerning] people's reactions to you as a very small baby -- your appearance, or problems your mother may have had with childbirth, or anything like that?

LS: Well, the problems she had were with the first two -- two boys. One died a week later, after he was born, and the other died at birth. But by the time I was born, I guess she was used to having babies. I came along about ten years later as a sort of surprise package. (Chuckle)

JW: For whom were you named:

LS: L-O-R-A Minerva Toombs.

JW: And for whom were you named?

LS: My father named me for my mother. But because hers was L-a-u-r-a, she spelt mine L-o-r-a, just to be stylish, I suppose. Minerva was this lovely grandmother



- LS: (that I told you about before) whose name... you know, Minerva was the goddess of Wisdom. Well, she was a very wise woman. Of the three sisters, I think she was the brilliant one. Because up there in that small town of Red Bluff, one or two judges and lawyers would come and sit on her front porch and discuss with her many little points. And she seemed to know the answers. One of her grandsons [who was in college] said, "Well, Grandma, how do you know so much?" because, naturally, she didn't go to college. "Well," she said, "I absorbed as life went on."
- JW: Do you remember the house in which you were born, or did you move from there at too young an age?
- LS: Oh, yes, I remember it. Because my uncle, my father's brother, Norman Thomas Toombs, built his house next door. [My] father built both the houses. They were white cottages -- that was the style at the time. [Uncle Norman was my] godfather and his wife was my godmother. So from time to time I went down there to visit with them until I became quite a bit older. Then naturally we saw both houses. I don't remember living in the cottage because we moved to San Francisco when I was about a year old.
- JW: How many floors did they have, and what was the general... what was the yard like and the neighborhood?
- LS: Well, these were cottages. Now cottages are one-story affairs with possibly two bedrooms, maybe three. My uncle's next door was much more [elaborate]. Well, I would say he liked things a little fancier. They had a beautiful backyard and a big cherry tree. And... he had two horses and a buggy [and two handsome dogs]. Often when I visited San Jose, my aunt would have little picnics [at Alum Rock Park], or a little birthday party -- if it was near my birthday, in the backyard. She had one of these trestle tables under the cherry tree, and took pictures and that sort of thing of the event.
- JW: What was the city of San Jose like? Was this inside the city limits?
- LS: Well, it was always a pretty little town [called the "Garden City"]. Of course, now it's a city, and it's developed and grown. But at that time it was a pretty little town. It had a downtown section and theater or two. I remember one time I went down to spend part of the vacation there and we went downtown to a very nice play -- I forget the name of it -- but it was an old English play. (I was a little young to remember, I guess.) And that was very nice.
- My aunt was a Christian Scientist. She had suffered dreadfully with "hay fever," as she called it -- I think it was more asthmatic. However, she became a Christian Science practitioner. So my Sundays and times were spent at Christian Science Sunday School, which was very [interesting and inspiring]. [Interruption]
- JW: Where was your first home in San Francisco?



- LS: At 1612 Baker Street, and that was between Pine and Bush about five or six blocks west of Fillmore. At that time it was the "Western Addition", which was a rather ultra section for middle-class people. Then, of course, [the city expanded] out to the ocean. But when my aunt first selected that lot and built her little cottage there, they said, "What do you want to go way out in the sand dunes for?" -- because most of the [Colored] people lived either in the Mission section or around Clay and Washington -- somewhat near Chinatown. Of course, when the Earthquake came, it bumed all of that, pathetically, just down to the ground. Maybe it was good because they were not the most artistic places. But, however, those people suffered really.
- JW: So you moved in with your aunt. What was her name?
- LS: Clara Logan Frazier. F-r-a-z-i-e-r.
- JW: And what was her occupation at that point?
- LS: Well, mainly housewife though she did sew for such people as the Crockers and Spreckels [and Floods]. Those were very wealthy people of the Gold Rush period.
- JW: Why did the family move, do you know?
- LS: Well, I don't think there was the work [in San Jose]. My father was a carpenter. As I say, he was a singer as well, but he got tired of one-night stands. You see, music was not a dependable business, organized like things are now. He used the talent he had, the trade that he had learned as a young fellow. He came to San Francisco... My aunt wanted to change that house. And the first thing he did was to lift that cottage, and made it into a three-story home.
- JW: It had originally been just one story?
- LS: Yes, a cottage. So we lived in the two upper floors and rented the lower flat. We had spacious rooms. It was amazing really how he designed it. It was a lovely old home of, we'll say, of the 1890's or early 1900 vintage.
- JW: I don't think we have mentioned yet your father's full name and your mother's maiden name.
- LS: Yes. My father, Alfred Nelson Toombs.
- JW: And your mother's maiden name before she married was?
- LS: Laura, L-a-u-r-a, Minerva Robinson.
- JW: So your father took up work as a carpenter once you moved to San Francisco?
- LS: Yes.



JW: Did your mother also have to work?

LS: No.

JW: She didn't? What did she do to occupy her time?

LS: Well, she was a housewife. In that day, women didn't work as much as they do now and she was a housewife. He did conduct the choir at Bethel Church, and she was the organist. I don't imagine they were paid very much, because people didn't pay for those things like they do now. You really just 'gave service'. But I imagine it was a little bit. I had a brother who was about three-and-a-half years younger than myself. She took care of the two children, and we lived in my aunt's home. The home was my aunt's [Mrs. Albert Frazier's] home and her husband's. She had no children. But we just loved her dearly, and everybody else loved her. She was "Aunt Clara" to the whole community, Black or White... I mean fair-skinned or dark, it made no difference.

JW: Were there many other Colored people in that area when you moved there?

LS: No, not when we moved in, but within, I would say, a few years, Dr. Leaner [and his] family. (He was what we call a podiatrist now, but they called him a chiropodist then.) His family moved in the next block across the street. And then another dear friend moved across the street in the same block at the corner. Their names were Jackson. [Interruption]

JW: The majority of the people in the neighborhood were of what ethnic background?

LS: Were White. You know...

JW: Irish? Jewish?

LS: It was a mixture: German, some Irish. Yes, Jewish on the corner -- very well-to-do. Then next door to us a Jewish family built. We were all friendly. Oh, we didn't encroach on the... we weren't people who... who went into other people's... neighbor's homes. We had such lovely friends of our own, and such nice times. We were pleasant. And in an emergency [naturally would assist when necessary]. [Interruption.]

JW: Were your parent's 'social' friends Colored?

LS: Oh, yes, all Colored.

JW: Why was that? Why didn't they have social.. friends that were White?

LS: I don't know. We never did. Maybe we were a little peculiar, I don't know. A lot of people did have White friends. But when we had [White] friends, as I say, they were either neighbors or storekeepers or people with whom we had done business or had some relationship in one way or another. We were friend-ly, not intimate.



- LS: It was just a way of our family, I guess.
- JW: As a little girl, did you play with the neighbors' kids?
- LS: Oh, yes! The school children. Our school was just two blocks away, down Pine Street between Divisadero and Scott. It was called Emerson Primary -- a lovely school in that day, of course. No problems. And a few Colored children. But all well-behaved and well-mannered and well-reared. Because, you see, the people in that day were... you didn't have this other element. These people were serious people who were trying to accomplish something and wanted everything better for their children than they had had it.
- JW: Were there children that you were asked not to associate with? Were there people that the family sort of shied away from?
- LS: Well, there was one girl... she was White. She was kind of "common," and, well... we didn't play with her too much, because she was quite unruly. And the parents were guarding against such things. You know, manners were very important in those days.
- JW: What was your brother's name?
- LS: Frazier Norman Toombs.
- JW: Would you consider yourselves close as brother and sister when you were children?
- LS: Oh, yes.
- JW: Did you play together?
- LS: Oh, yes. He was a little young -- younger than I and he had his little friends. But for other purposes, in the home and all, we were close.
- JW: Were you closer to your father or mother, do you think?
- LS: I think it was about equal. My father was very witty. But at the dinner table he was very particular that you used the right fork or that you used your napkin or sat properly. We were taught not to interfere with the conversation, unless we were asked to answer something. That didn't mean that we were throttled by any manner of means. We could talk too. It was very nice.

My mother did the cooking and [house-keeping]. My mother and aunt sewed in a sort of family room. They each had their own sewing machine. They made our clothes and all of their own clothes. Mama raised birds. Oh, she had about maybe fifteen, sixteen canary birds. People used to sing as they worked. Auntie had a



- LS: soprano voice. and Mama contralto. And they would sing as they sewed and the birds would just try to overpower them. I remember when I was a girl studying singing and trying to learn to trill, our canary would look at me and say, "You poor human. Let me show you how it can be done." (Chuckle) [He would preen himself and poise himself as any prima donna and trill with many flourishes.]
- JW: Did your mother raise the birds for the pleasure of it or did she sell them?
- LS: For pleasure. My father built her a large outdoor cage for them -- indoor/outdoor, so they could go in and out. But we had a couple of birds in every room (Laughter), and they kept up a chatter.
- JW: Whose job was it to clean up after them?
- LS: Well, Mama did most of it but I did... as I grew up, I had to help. So as far as I'm concerned, I could avoid birds. This cleaning up after them. Somebody gave [my great-granddaughter] a couple of parakeets. And though they are her birds, the lot falls to me to keep them clean and fed... She remembers sometimes.
- JW: These wealthy families for whom your aunt was working, how did she go about getting work and getting the measurements and that kind of thing?
- LS: Well, you know, not while I was there, but it was before I knew anything about it. She used to tell us about it. As I told you, my uncle worked in the Palace Hotel, and they wanted somebody [to sew]. So he suggested his wife. And she went there. You would go to the home. Most of these women were oversized, [and needed special fitting]. You couldn't go down and just get a dress off the rack. That came later. Most people had to have nice things made. So naturally she was well-paid, and she worked for the Spreckels, [Crockers and Floods and other wealthy women].
- JW: The Crockers?
- LS: Aunt Clara did not continue very long with the Crockers, and two or three others of that ilk. But she didn't... she wasn't too crazy about continuing that. But she did have an association. Now that picture there is the gift that I think Mrs. Crocker gave her.
- JW: The cocker spaniel [a two-toned painting].
- LS: Yes. Matilda Lots... L-o-t-z... was a San Francisco girl with talent and [Mrs. Crocker] had a half a dozen of these done by this girl and paid her so that she could go to France and study with Rosa Bonheur, who was the famous animal painter of that day. I think it's 1877 when that picture was done. So she [Mrs. Crocker] gave her that one as a gift, because my aunt admired art. Another lady gave her this one.
- JW: Who is that in that painting?
- LS: Well, now that's the question. We don't even know the artist, though I had it



- LS: restored a few years ago and he looked and looked. He said, to him, he thought it was the old Spanish School in the 1500's, but we could prove nothing. Mr. Vickery, who was an art connoisseur at that time, examined it, but we cannot find the name of the artist. Therefore, it isn't worth as much as it would be if we only knew the artist. But it's a lovely thing.
- JW: And you think it's several hundred years old?
- LS: Yes. The man who restored it here a few years ago had worked in the Paris Museum, and he said he would judge that it was of the Spanish School in the 1500's.
- JW: Were there any particular stories that you remember your uncle telling about life in the Palace Hotel? It was the most luxurious hotel in the world at the time.
- LS: Yes. Well, of course, they did talk about [the people]. They had a rotunda where people in their carriages rode inside the hotel in this rotunda and showed off their clothes. My aunt used to often go down and sit in the balcony -- they had a big gallery around... and watch the ladies with their elegant clothes of the period. But I don't remember too much else about that. There were stories that came to us of the earlier slavery periods. Though our people were mainly all free... born free, they saw things and heard things that were pretty horrible. And they talked a great deal about it.
- JW: Do you remember any of these stories?
- LS: Well, yes. My grandmother tells a tale: This girl was, we'll say about fifteen or sixteen... about sixteen. She was a little maid in the house, not the house that they [our ancestors] had -- the man, Mr. Logan, was entirely different. But this was a nearby plantation. And, you know, the young sons preyed upon these pretty young things. She was a blond, blue-eyed, and could have been White if it had been easy for women to get away. But it wasn't easy. Men could escape. It was not very easy for a young girl. So anyway, she came up pregnant. And the mother [mistress of the plantation] wanted to know who did it. She wanted her to blame some one of the other young men -- slaves, you know. And she wouldn't do it. She said, "It was your son." [The angered mistress had the girl] tied up to a tree or a post, and had her beaten to say that it wasn't her son. She had a mis-carriage right there [and died]. Now that's one of the tales. She told it many, many times.

After my grandmother came to live with us, she used to have candy pulls. She'd make molasses candy. You didn't have all that like children do now. (The children who come in here [my studio] have so much money to waste.) When Grandma made candy, [we invited] all the neighborhood children. She made them wash their hands and put butter on them. And they'd have to pull and make taffy. That was quite an event. So if they heard it was going to happen, the house would be full... eight, ten, maybe twelve children. That meant... since everybody practically in the neighborhood were White, they were all White but us... but they had a good time.



- LS: That sort of thing went on. Our next door neighbors were Irish, and very friendly and very lovely people. When I was a little child, Nora was a growing girl, I guess. She used to put me in the buggy... so they said, I don't remember about it... and ride me up and down, teach me how to walk, and all the different little things that you do for babies.
- JW: What did your brother go on to do when he got older?
- LS: You know, there were not the opportunities, neither for White nor Black, in San Francisco like today. He completed grammar school. He was not an avid student. But he worked for a man who conducted an art store for quite a long time. Then, as he grew up, he went on the road. That was the thing young men did, and quite a few young men put themselves through college by working on the road.
- JW: You mean travelling salesman?
- LS: No, as a waiter.
- JW: Oh, the railroad.
- LS: You see, we had trains in those days. And with tips and that sort of thing, a lot of men became fairly prosperous in that work -- built their homes and conducted things. Of course, they didn't get rich. But some were smarter than others and they knew how to invest. A lot of times when you work on a private car, you hear of things to do that the lay people would never hear about.
- JW: (I guess I want to turn back to you now:) Was there anything when you were small that you were forbidden to do? Or things that you were afraid of? Did your parents tell you ghost stories, or tell you stories to keep you from doing something or the other?
- LS: Well, they never allowed... they never told stories to frighten us. There was no bogey man. There was nothing to frighten us. Of course, sometimes you were afraid of the dark. I was always afraid of a mouse or a rat, but we didn't have very many of those. My father saw to it that that was taken care of. But I remember... it's written here... I remember when I was a little girl, oh, maybe eight or nine, I was an avid reader, and we just loved fairy tales. So in the paper, for weeks ahead, we were expecting this wonderful play, "Jack and the Bean Stalk." (We didn't have movies.) This had been looked forward to and they had described the giant and how he would be dressed and how they would make him appear so huge...
- END TAPE  
.....  
BEGIN TAPE 1:4:2
- LS: My mother bought tickets for a Saturday matinee. But Saturday morning my job was to dust all the furniture, the lower parts -- of tables and chairs and the piano legs



LS: and oh, whatever I was supposed to do... And "whatnots." I guess you've seen those old "whatnots," walnut or some dark wood, and it would sit in the corner and you had all kinds of little doo dads, like people have now. But it was open, and every one of those had to be dusted and put back in its right place. Okay. But Saturday came and I was to go to the matinee. I had gathered all the neighbor children in. And in this upstairs shed that my father had built in the backyard, we stored trunks and boxes with old-fashioned clothes and things in it -- but we had a place to play. We called it the playhouse.

So I gathered all the neighbor children and we went through... oh, we spent the whole morning playing some of the stories. We dragged out these old clothes, like costumes, and fixed ourselves. My mother called me several times: "Lora, come and get your work done." "All right." But I was so wrapped up in what we were doing that I didn't feel the passage of time. So when lunch time came, my Mother called me for lunch and the other children went home. Then I said, "I must hurry up now and get dressed to go." "Well," she said, "you've had your lunch, now you may go up and take your bath and get in bed." And she took my brother, who was possibly four years old, I don't know, to see this play. He wasn't old enough to understand it, really. And the play never came back. It was the whole New York cast who had come out. Well, I have grieved about that to this day, because it meant so much to me [slight interruption] that I have grieved over it all my life. That was one of the big griefs of my childhood.

JW: How old were you then, about seven?

LS: Oh, I think about eight. And I never forgot that when I had to do something, and I was told to do it... in those days, if you were told to do something and you didn't do it, you missed something else. Believe me, you remembered it, because it really hurt. That hurt me worse than anything I can think of! (Laughter)

JW: Did your parents spank you?

LS: What?

JW: Were you spanked?

LS: Oh, occasionally. They didn't spare the rod. Not that they were unjust. But they talked a great deal and discussed many things, and you had to listen. [Interruption.] But I guess they got their point across. I don't know. I often wonder. I try to talk to these young people of mine and they absolutely tune me out. They never heard a word I said! I used to pick up the children and take them to school. The mothers, and that boy [a grandson who'd come in earlier] -- I would talk to them about many things they should or should not do, on the way to school, and when... you would think they would say something, they would ask me a question completely unrelated to anything I had been talking about, which told me, and by their subsequent actions, they hadn't heard a word I said and had no intention



LS: of hearing it.

JW: Do you remember anything that your parents constantly drummed into you, any proverbs or sayings that were favorite with them?

LS: Well, yes. I can't remember all the proverbs. But they did drum in about being honest and about being respectful to elderly people and controlling your own temper and yourself, conducting yourself as a lady should conduct herself -- and gentlemen too. (I don't think my brother heard as much.) (Chuckle) He didn't let it bother him that much. But I always wanted to please. But sometimes it was a little trying.

JW: Did they quote the Bible...?

LS: Yes.

JW: Both of them?

LS: Well, my mother and aunt were the talkers. Of course, Grandma did too. They quoted some things, yes. But it was more on morals, manners, customs, things to do and things not to do that they discussed with you at length, and I mean at length -- You must stand there looking very interested and not lose your attention. (Chuckle)

JW: What kind of chores did you have to do?

LS: Oh, as I grew up, as I said, when I was a little girl, I had this dusting to do on Saturday morning, and I had to make my bed, naturally.

JW: Did you have a wood-burning stove?

LS: Yes.

JW: Who hauled the wood?

LS: My brother and my father. And another thing, too. The men, my [father and] uncle. You see, we all lived together. (People lived together more than they do now.) They saw to it that the wood was brought up from that lower outdoor storage place. In the lower [shed] my father had tools and coal and wood, and we had coal and wood on the back porch which was two stories up. But the boy, my brother, was taught to carry it up and see that it was right. My father sawed it into small pieces. Then either he or my uncle would chop it. They didn't believe in women doing certain things. That doesn't mean we didn't do anything -- we surely did. Because I never had to scrub floors or things of that sort. [Telephone Interruption.]

JW: The women didn't scrub the floors?

LS: Oh, none of those kinds of things. The men didn't think the women in the family should do that sort of thing. Now, in my youthful eighties, I'm doing things that



LS: I never had to do when I was twenty, when I was sixteen, when I was fourteen. It was just different. You can't get anybody to do it. I've tried to get some boys. I used to have boys and they did a good job. You paid them. Of course, I paid my own boys. (They had to have some spending change.) But for myself, back in the days as I grew up, I had to help with the dusting and with various things.

In our neighborhood, after the Spanish-American war, Orientals came into the neighborhood. They had a little shop, and they came and asked... Imagine, twenty-five cents an hour! And my aunt was not one who enjoyed housework. She liked the daintier things, and so, of course, she grasped at... When we moved away, those people cried, because they said she had been their first customer.

JW: Were these Chinese, Filipino or what?

LS: No, these were Japanese. They would come in once every six weeks and do all the windows in the house. They just came, rang the doorbell, "Today is the day I'm coming to do the windows." But every Friday they would come and clean the living room. (We had what you called the front parlor and back parlor, like that.) Then the dining room, more of a family room was back behind that. They cleaned, and then they mopped on their hands and knees. They cleaned on their hands and knees... the bathrooms... and did all the kind of work that I am doing myself now or it doesn't get done at all. Because my daughter hates it [housework]! She's a grown woman, a very lovely woman. She sews elegantly. Anything I wear, everything -- suits, coats, anything the children wear -- she does it. And she cooks beautifully. She thinks I can't cook at all, which please me no end. (Laugh) After school I had to get right straight home and get my practicing done. I had to get in an hour before school.

JW: Practicing what?

LS: Piano. And then an hour after school. I did scales and technique and all those delightful things in the morning before breakfast. And in the afternoon, the other things like sonatas and pretty pieces.

JW: At what age did you start playing piano?

LS: For my sixth birthday, that was my birthday present, my first lesson. And let me tell you who was my first teacher. It was Viola Smith.

JW: And she was Mary Ellen Pleasant's niece?

LS: [No. She was White] and she was lame. A nursemaid or something had dropped her when she was a baby, and, of course, people didn't pay attention to such things. And she had a very severe, painful hip condition. So she always used crutches; she had to walk with crutches. Teachers used to come to the house and give you the lessons. She played very well. She grew up in the home with Mrs. Gordon and her three daughters. That was a niece of Mammy Pleasant. I didn't know Mammy



LS: Pleasant. I only heard about her because she was gone, you know. But, however, that is.

Then it was my job to either run errands to the nearby grocery store, or ... and have the table set ... and help my mother get the meal ready. We always had the meal at six o'clock, my father came home. And often at the table at the end of the meal, my aunt would read from the newspaper. There would be discussions of the various political situations of the day. And she would read articles and so forth. And, of course, at that time they were doing a lot of lynching down South. The Ku Klux Klan was very -- what do you call it? -- They [in their sheet disguises] were capering about. So she would read the horror stories out of the newspaper, as well. So we were well-informed as to what was going on.

Friends often dropped in, and in an informal way were invited to the table. People dropped in, you see, differently than now, because everybody's working and nobody has any time for anything. They always had time. My mother and aunt always had time for people, the neighbors or our good friends. In San Francisco at that time there were a number of very lovely families, maybe altogether about a thousand people, scattered through the city. You see, you weren't herded into ghettos or into group living. You bought a house, or you rented a house, where you felt like it. Then, of course, these other things came along later. (Real estate me for the main part were to blame, I'm sure.) But, however, in those days they were scattered out in various parts of the city. But they were lovely fine people. They weren't all fair-skinned, and they weren't all black. Many of them were brown. But they were very, very moral, and respectable.

JW: Was there any particular reaction on the part of Whites to the lynchings and other stories in the South? Did they also think of it as ... horrible?

LS: I don't know what they thought. I don't think they thought about anything. If they did, they may have discussed it in their own homes. But this was at our dinner table. Then after we had heard these things ... it was our job, my brother and myself, and then a cousin who came down from the country -- we were the same age, and she was like a sister -- and it was our job to get up, clear the table, wash the dishes, put them away and get to our homework.

JW: Did you take the local Afro-American paper?

LS: Oh, yes! There were several of them, but the most [popular one] -- the one we enjoyed most was called the Western Outlook, and that was conducted by a man named Francis. Let me see ... what was his name, Joe Francis? or something like that. Because he and his wife spent their honeymoon in my mother's cottage down in San Jose. He has a daughter here now, Le Conte Francis Clark.

JW: Right.

LS: Well, it was her father. There was another man connected with it ... let's see,



- LS: I think his name was Maddox.
- JW: Walter Maddox?
- LS: Yes, Maddox, M-a-d-d-o-x, or a-x.
- JW: O-x, I think.
- LS: O-x, that's right. Have you ever talked with Le Conte?
- JW: No, someone else is interviewing her.
- LS: Oh, I see. Well, she could tell you a lot! I'm so sorry that things like that disappeared, because we had stacks and stacks of the Western Outlook. There were other papers but they weren't as good. I can't remember them. But if anybody was going to do anything, my mother and aunt bought them anyway, to help them.
- JW: How did the family celebrate Christmas?
- LS: Oh, we had a lovely time. Of course, we had a Christmas tree, and when we were very, very young, Santa Claus was a very mystical person. You had to be very, very good or Santa Claus wouldn't come. Then, of course, as time went on, why we helped with the tree, and helped with the gifts. Nowadays children are so much more aware. They help with the gifts and tie them. They still think that Santa Claus might be around, but they know that something else has to happen. However, we had, of course, a nice dinner, .. Often we would invite lonely friends, a widow or a young girl or young man who were alone and might feel lonely. We invited them over for Christmas or Thanksgiving. We didn't make a big thing of it, you know, like a big social event. And we never had liquor in the home or anything of that sort. In fact, people didn't think of that, not that a few people didn't imbibe, and a few became drunkards. But the average family and the average kind of people were people who were controlled and didn't indulge in things that were harmful.
- JW: So it was for reasons of discipline than of religious injunctions? Because some religious associate alcohol with the Devil. But this wasn't the main reason?
- LS: Yes. Well, they just didn't do it. It wasn't the right thing to do and they didn't do it. People were more inclined to do what was right.
- JW: Did you go to church on Christmas?
- LS: Sometimes, yes. But most times we were so busy getting things together for the children that we didn't get out. After my children grew up somewhat then I would go on Christmas Eve, or go Christmas morning. But when you have a lot of small children around, it isn't possible to do that, because they have looked forward to



LS: [Christmas] all year and you've got to be there to help them enjoy it.

JW: How about birthdays?

LS: Oh, yes. We had lovely birthday parties.

JW: I'm talking about when you were small.

LS: Yes. All the way through.

JW: Did you have a nickname?

LS: No.

JW: You were just called Lora?

LS: That's right. It was short enough... (Chuckle)

JW: Were there any other kinds of celebrations in the community in general that you remember... special days, the Fourth of July?

LS: Oh, yes.

JW: Were there any particular things that San Franciscans would do...?

LS: They had parades and picnics and we joined in all these things. And, of course, we had Sunday School picnics and, oh, lots of nice times.

JW: What about Negro History Week? (I guess this was a little early for that.)

LS: What?

JW: Negro History Week wasn't officially celebrated until 1916.

LS: Oh, no, that came on later.

JW: Was there any day during the year that Colored Americans celebrated as a special day?

LS: I don't know exactly. But we did have many things related to the prominent people who were coming along. You know you couldn't go to a hotel. I don't care how cultured or how well-educated or how important you were, if you were Colored, you just couldn't. They weren't accepted. So we always had an extra, what we called a spare bedroom. And people like Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Booker T. Washington, William Pickens, and Mr. DuBois... and numbers of others, I can't remember them. But those were the really important ones. And in our simple way... we didn't put on a big front. So at our table we had nourishing food, not elegant



LS: nor fancy, but they had dinner with us and then went on to their speaking [engagement]. And we would all go. And as children we were told about it. My grandmother had made us very aware, and my father too... telling the stories of the many things that happened while they were in the South.

JW: Where would they speak?

LS: Oh, in some of the halls or churches. You see, we had several churches. Bethel was a Methodist church. Then there was the Third Baptist... let me see, I forget, Hyde and Clay, I think. (I think it was.) Anyway, it's still there.

JW: I'm trying to what... I know eventually there came the Booker T. Washington Center, but that wasn't built...

LS: The what?

JW: The Booker T. Washington Center hadn't been built.

LS: Oh, yes. I told you here [in previous interview] I was one of those in the early beginnings, on Divisadero Street between Geary and O'Farrell, I think... as I vaguely remember... there was an old bakery. And I used to... I had children's classes in dancing and dramatics, singing and that sort of thing. We gave plays and little operettas and a number of things in those early beginnings of the Booker T. Washington Community Center. There was an elevated place about as wide across as this room, and that's where the bake ovens were originally. So with a little carpenter work and a little fixing... They didn't do too much to it -- it was pretty ordinary. We gave our plays on this stage. It became the stage. We had classes after school, and I conducted those for a period of years, until I moved over here. It was fun. And some of those young people showed a lot of talent and went on to become famous, and were in New York plays and vaudeville. The names sort of get away from me.

JW: I want to ask you particularly about DuBois. Do you remember anything about him when he came to visit?

LS: I can vaguely -- I was young, quite young. But I vaguely can see his face. He was a very serious man, and he talked at length on the things that troubled and disturbed him. Because he could see the great need for help, for education, for elevation, to awaken these people spiritually and mentally. And then my mother and aunt and many of their friends had a reading club. He wrote a book called The Souls of Black Folk, and that was one of their main books that they worked with.

Sunday evenings; in our home, friends would drop by, because Mama played and my father sang and both of them sang duets and that sort of thing. And my grandmother added her little two cents worth, and would often tell stories of things that happened in those days -- things she saw. They were not badly treated but they saw other people badly treated. Many of these things that the men would tell, she could agree with because they had seen such things. And I remember Booker Washington. Then later, his wife and son came quite often to



- LS: San Francisco, oh, maybe three or four times, and they always stayed at our house. They'd have to stay at somebody's house, because they were not accepted in the hotels no matter how lovely they were.
- JW: What was your father's impression of... What did he think of the philosophy that these men had? Did he agree with Booker T. Washington, did he respect Booker T. Washington?
- LS: Oh, yes. You see, people have condemned him, but he was right. He looked at the poor people, sharecroppers and people who were trying to eke out some kind of a starvation living with no education, no way. He saw that if he would show them how to plant a crop and make it grow... Then, of course, this was a gradual buildup. Yes, he persisted in that. And he did fawn over White people to help him. He knew what he was doing -- He had to get the money out of them somehow for these people, because they came to him ragged and barefoot. He saw their great need. Now, then, as time went on, many of those... the children of those original people went on to colleges to do professional things. But what he was doing was trying to help these people that were starving, who had nothing after that Civil War. They had no money... they were on little scraps of land. He showed them how to do things. And they sent their children. And the children naturally could help the parents.

..... END TAPE

BEGIN TAPE 2:4:1 (SECOND SESSION - OCTOBER 4, 1978)

LS: [Reading in part from prepared notes:]

My aunt's, Clara Logan Frazier, pet charity was the old folks Home at Beulah [now incorporated into the City of Oakland], California, for Colored folks. She was also interested in young people. So she developed a little club and rehearsed the group in plays and entertainments using the proceeds to aid the old folks home. One of the most outstanding talents was Bert Williams, a comedian, who became a famous Fallies star in New York. [And] Andy Summers, an Oakland boy, a talented pianist on all levels.

We had the pleasure of seeing and hearing Booker T. Washington, William Pickens, W. E. DuBois and many others who used our spare room, ate at our table, while lecturing in San Francisco. In those days Colored people, no matter how cultured or how important, were not accepted at San Francisco hotels. The South might have been bad in its way, but the North was nasty too, in a more subtle way. Of course, my brother and I were sent to bed. But we would tiptoe down the stairs and peep through a grating to watch the rehearsals.

Adolescence: As I said before, we had lovely times. Weekends were very lively. Sometimes I went to Oakland to spend time with my dearest friend, Leslie Witten. The crowd of boys and girls would gather there and we had games and music and



LS: loving comradeship. Now, there was no dancing on Sunday in the homes at that time. But we had simple refreshments and everybody was "nice." People were taught to be "nice," and so everybody was "nice." There were no sexy things or anything like that. That just wasn't it at that time. Most of the friends moved to Oakland and Berkeley after the Earthquake and Fire. They used their insurance money to buy homes there. It was a delightful trip on the ferryboat crossing the Bay, and we went many times, back and forth. Oh, it was delightful!

We were all in high school by that time. I went to Girls' High. The standards were high and I worked hard for good credits. Should have gone to the University, but my father was not well. By this time I had developed a singing voice and longed to be an opera singer. I studied piano and voice at Arillago Music College, later San Francisco Conservatory, voice privately with Marie Withrow, Albina Paramino, Georgina Wilkie, Zeta Wood and others. So far out West, the only opportunities for Colored girls were in the honky-tonk night clubs, which did not appeal to me at all.

Most of the friends were marrying. So it was in the wind. I had met Verner Baldwin Scott. My father and his first wife were frequent visitors at the Baldwin home in Washington, D.C. many years before. Verner and a group of young men from Denver were sent to meet my mother, Laura Toombs and my Aunt Clara Frazier. As time went on... [End of Notes] [Interruption]

JW: When were you married?

LS: Let's see. I think [June 12] 1917.

JW: During the War?

LS: Yes.

JW: What kind of wedding was it? Where was the wedding held?

LS: Oh, just in our home. A small home wedding.

JW: Did you have bridesmaids and that kind of thing?

LS: My friend, Leslie Witten. But I didn't have the fancy wedding that some of the others had. My father wasn't well. We went on a little weekend honeymoon and came back. When we arrived in the house, he had had this terrible, terrible stroke. He never was even able to feed himself, and he lay for three years... Of course, that's a long story...

[Prepared Notes continued]

From the time we were sixteen I began to teach piano. I was very lucky to have talented, eager students, so my efforts made a big impression. After marriage,



LS: three children, paralyzed invalids in the home, I was in a constant state of spiritual and mental exhaustion. I knew a singing career was hopeless, but started to study again. One teacher suggested I make teaching a career and insisted it was a respectable business. One could maintain a family and other responsibilities and receive a certain amount of satisfaction from helping others to achieve what I had hoped for myself. I thought it over and have taken various courses in music pedagogy at the University of California, College of Holy Names and private sources. So over a fifty-year period I've enjoyed helping many students in piano and singing, have worked with junior and senior choirs and choral groups.

For a period of years I taught aesthetic and folk dancing [and] dramatics at Booker Washington Community Center in San Francisco where we struggled to bring inspiration and beauty to the young people in the drab surroundings of an old bakery on Divisadero Street. The place where the ovens had been located, we created into a stage and gave many well-rehearsed plays and entertainments. After moving to Berkeley, I had to give that up because my children were growing up and needed my attention.

As the years have flown by, I've enjoyed working with children and adults. Here and there some unusual talents developed and several made the New York stage. A number became serious music majors and are holding positions in schools and colleges. I am grateful to be blessed with a goodly class of interested students.

JW: What was your first exposure to opera, and what motivated you to want to take it up as a career?

LS: Our family enjoyed... You see, San Francisco was sort of a proving ground of fine plays that went on to New York, because it had a very selective, critical audience. We went to many fine plays, heard Shakespearean plays and other fine plays with excellent actors -- and no microphone remember -- and you didn't miss a word. Then, of course, the opera came to San Francisco, and we had records. We had heard many famous singers who came. One of them was Tetrazinni. And, oh, there's a number of names that kind of elude me at the moment. (But if I had thought about it, I could have gotten that all put together. Anyway, we heard many, many fine singers who came.)

And many of our own aspiring young people came through clubs that would present them or churches would present them. Of course, we don't hear them any more. And for very, very [good reasons]. Imagine paying fifty cents to go and hear somebody give a lovely program. Because that was the only way those young Colored artists could be heard. That's the way I heard Roland Hayes; the Fanny Coppin Club, a group of ladies, presented him here in Oakland... a young man. [His able accompanist was] William Lawrence. Anyway, you could tell then that Hayes was really going to be great. But he was young. Then he went on and developed and went to Europe and so forth. But we never missed one of his programs. Dorothy Maynor and, oh, there was a girl from Los Angeles... Florence Cole... and a number of other young men and women who were trying to



LS: do things with themselves, but they had no outlet. We were too far away [from New York].

JW: In considering a career in opera, you were then prepared to move to New York or to Europe?

LS: Yes, I was hoping that that would be my good fortune. Well, it didn't work out. The War came on; and before we knew it, my father, as I said, was ill; and there was no money. And, another thing, my family was horrified when I talked about going away to college... I wanted to go to Fisk, really because I had met some charming young women from there, young girls, and, oh, I would just have loved it! But... You know, that's where Roland Hayes went... trudged there barefoot. And there were, oh, let me see, Marion Anderson. I remember when she first came and sang with a symphony at the Opera House.

JW: Was this in the Thirties?

LS: I guess that was. That was quite some time ago. But, as a young person, we had records of fine artists, and we went to concerts and we heard operas. I mean heard operatic numbers and that sort of thing. We did not have television to bring it to us live. But we heard enough about it. And an occasional opera came to San Francisco, not like the Opera season that we have now. And so whenever it came, we would go.

JW: Did you hear Paul Robeson?

LS: Oh, yes. But at the time I heard him, I didn't think too much of his singing, because he was older, he was really espousing other attitudes. He sang a program, but I didn't think that that was equal to his abilities that I had heard about. But we did hear "The Emperor Jones". That was not an opera. (I think since they have made it into an opera.) But it's just a one-man play, and it was really amazing. Unfortunately, he drank himself to death afterward. But it was really quite a play and was well attended here. He was a fine actor.

And then there were, oh, many fine plays. I'm trying to think of several other young people. (Maybe it will come to me. If I had known I would have thought about it and whipped it together.) The two Johnson young men... my aunt... whenever any of those young people came to San Francisco, she would have them at the house just to give them a little friendly feeling. The two, Rosamond Johnson and his brother, James Weldor Johnson, they came and presented many of the things they did. And then there was another play, hm-m, what was it? It was a group of young men. I think Johnson was among that group too. I know there was a silly little song "Under The Bamboo Tree." I forget the name of the play. I was just a child at that time and you do forget. Though I know, there are some notes upstairs. I'll find it.

JW: What about minstrel shows, were they still being performed in San Francisco?



LS: Yes. Of course, we never liked those.

JW: Were there any public protests or letters-to-editors or...?

LS: Yes, because we felt they were demeaning. That isn't the way we wanted ourselves represented because, you see, in those early days, the kind of people that were here were honest, hardworking and dignified. They didn't have fine jobs and they didn't have a lot of money. But they did have character and they did have morality. They did have aspiration for themselves and their children. They struggled, yes. But, they were a class of people -- honorable people. We've got plenty of them now. Well... The people who aren't doing what we think they should be making so much noise that we don't hear about the just plain, everyday middle-class folks that struggle. They don't have time to make a noise. (Chuckle)

JW: What was the sequence of schools that you attended? [Interruption]

LS: There was an elementary school called Emerson, and it was just two blocks away. We went to that school. Schools, of course, were very, very good in those days. I mean you either learned your lessons or you didn't get promoted. And you were really in trouble. They didn't just pass you through like a sausage machine, you see, whether you knew it or not. You had to know it. If you had to take a whole year over, you just had to take it over, that's all.

JW: Did teachers ever punish students?

LS: Oh, yes. You were punished by being kept after school if you were late or if you didn't turn in your homework, or sometimes you were marked down.

JW: Were you ever singled out because you were one of the few or only Colored children in the class... for special attention one way or the other?

LS: Hm-m-m. I don't think so. One time I had a teacher named Miss Stallman. I'll never forget her. She was very good. She was a little dark woman. She wasn't Colored; I don't know what she was, but she was a little olive-skinned woman. Her name was Stallman. I had read through the reader and I went up proudly to tell her that I had completed that and read everything in it. (I thought it [what the teacher subsequently did] was such a stupid thing.) So she marked me down for going ahead when it wasn't assigned. She said, "I didn't assign it! You're not supposed to go beyond your assignment." Well, people were a little thoughtless in those days. They were reared so differently.

But, I will say, in that class we learned to dramatize the stories that were in our reader. They took us about from school to school to do the reading and read in groups, you know, like little plays. It was lots of fun. Then several other teachers in the school always wanted me to get the programs ready. I don't know why they picked me... but if there was a program to be gotten ready... we had Friday afternoon programs... it was up to me to do it. And there was one little girl, a little German girl, who lived around the corner -- the prettiest little voice.



LS: And I had her come over to my mother's to our house and my mother taught her a little song, and they were so pleased. Then, of course, we had spelling bees. Oh, that was loads of fun! I think kids miss it. There's nobody... Schools are so crowded, they don't have time for any fun like that. Their fun is something else -- its sort of manufactured fun. But this was so much fun!

So then on through that elementary school then several blocks away to a "grammar school," they called it. Now you call it a "middle school." That began with the... sixth, seventh and eighth, I think. That was interesting and, of course, you felt you were growing up a bit.

JW: What was the name of that school?

LS: Hamilton. Hamilton Grammar School. That's what they called it. And we had some lovely teachers. They were really dedicated teachers and enjoyed us very, very much. Then there was Girls' High School.

JW: What were your best subjects?

LS: Well, I scarcely ever made under 95 in anything but math. I was an igrominous flop in math! Oh, I managed to scramble through -- I don't know how. But I guess I just wasn't interested. But I loved history and reading and spelling and grammar. We had a grammar examination: I think I was the only one in the city that made a hundred percent.

JW: Did you get some kind of special recognition for that?

LS: No, nothing. Nowadays they would have given me a little blue ribbon or something. But I was told, and my family was told that I was... it was an unexpected thing. They just wanted us to do it. [Break]

It was a surprise. One afternoon they sat us all down and all the schools in the city had this examination, that is, diagramming about fifty sentences, I think. This was a long time ago. But, anyway... Oh, that was fun. I loved it! Some of them were quite tricky with your subject, predicate, and your adjectives, and then your adverbial adjective phrases. You had a long string of sentences down. They said I was the one who made a hundred percent. But I was never given any particular... recognition for it, other than they said in the school... I was brought before the classes as the one who [made a hundred percent] and showed the paper. Anyway, that was that.

JW: Did you take a foreign language?

LS: Yes, I had French, Latin, and a smattering of Spanish and a little smattering of



- LS: German... But the teacher from whom we took German after school, had to go back to Germany or something, and we didn't finish that up. But I would like to have completed the German and I never have since.
- JW: Why was French so popular then when California had a much stronger Spanish heritage?
- LS: Well, I don't know. French was the cultural language, I guess, and then Girls' High School... Girls' High School was almost like a private high school. It was a public school. You didn't pay to go there. Of course, you bought your own books. You bought everything yourself. French is a cultural language and the people who went there would like to learn French because, of course, naturally they would be going to Europe. Quite wealthy girls went there. Lowell High School was the boys' high school. They were not together like they are now. And, of course, I had a couple of years of Latin, which is always a good background for most everything else. And I took Spanish privately with a friend of ours from Panama. Then I had other Spanish lessons, you know, university extension, that sort of thing. Our folks, my mother and aunt, belonged to a little Spanish club. It became rather popular later, you see.
- JW: What would they do in this club?
- LS: Oh, they had this little Spanish club. They learned with a friend from... a West Indian friend of some kind. Then they would try to talk to one another and try to talk on the phone to one another. And at our table... if you had to have the butter or the milk or whatever, you had to ask for it in Spanish. And they had the cutest little book. It was called Spanish At A Glance. It had all these little normal, family conversations.
- Oh, people had a lot of fun. They had time for fun. See, the women didn't work. Some widows worked. Some of the people worked. But the average parent stayed home with their children, and was there to see that their child was home and in the house not later than 3:30 if you got out at three. It took a little time to walk home.
- Nobody came and picked you up with a car. Do you know, I have children here that come in here -- I mean teenagers -- never been on a bus! I said to the mother, "Aren't they spoiled? They don't even know how to get on a bus." They are carted back and forth. They'll go to a phone and call home, "I'm ready. Come and get me." I mean, not "Please, come and get me," but, "I'm ready, come and get me." (Chuckle)
- JW: What kinds of extra curricular activities were you involved in in high school?  
[Interruption]
- LS: I was in the choral club and plays. I loved dramatics and little operettas and things of that sort. Generally, I had a lead or something. And in the... [B. T. Washington Center] we had dances. We also learned. On Saturdays they had a



LS: dance class there. And, oh, we had a lot of fun.

JW: At what point was there a social separation between the Colored girls and the other girls?

LS: There were only three or four of us there. We always had a separation. We had our own friends and we had lovely little parties and things in our own homes. We had no association with them after school. Oh, one or two friends. There were always one or two that you find are friends. And they came to our... my home, which was a very nice home and I went to their home occasionally, you know, and spend an afternoon. But our family wasn't very particular about including them.

JW: Was this true of the other ethnic groups? Did the Jewish girls go their own way and the Irish girls go their own way, or did all of the so-called "White" groups mix back and forth.

LS: I think the Jewish girls went among their own groups. Then, of course, there were... in that school, Girls' High, at that age in San Francisco, at that stage, they had... many of them belonged to the social groups. They didn't go to private schools as much as they do now. Oh, some of them went to Catholic schools. Of course, they weren't in that school. But they had their own social life and we had our own social life. We had lovely times.

JW: So there was never any question of any interracial...?

LS: No, no. No, no. You didn't even think about it. Because our families provided us with such lovely social background. We never even thought about it. Not that we weren't friendly. We were not un-friendly. We just didn't include them and they didn't include us and we didn't think about being [left out].

END TAPE 2:4:1

BEGIN TAPE 2:4:2

LS: ... by discussing things and telling you what you ought to do and what you ought not to do. (Chuckle) And "standards." They held up "standards" and we were expected to maintain those "standards." Our friends' parents the same.

The friends all got together and planned little social events. We had little Friday evening home dancing parties and met at various homes. Parents all there. Never thought of turning out the lights (Chuckle)... Dancing in the dark. We had lots of lovely times. Then there were other events, and we went to concerts and fine plays. And, yes, we were inspired by many of the stories we read. (I can't pinpoint them right this minute.) Most everything that was written that people read in those days pointed a moral, or held up a certain type of "standard" that it was just normal to live up to.

JW: At what point do you think that you confronted the reality of racial proscription --



- JW: that there were certain things that as a Colored person you just might as well forget about?
- LS: All the way through... from elementary school right through. And we discussed it in the home. And you could feel it. It wasn't blatant, but it was there. And you knew it was there. And your parents made you aware. They planned so many other nice things for you that you just didn't even need them or think about them. We lived in a world apart. Except that we went to their schools, and we were told to learn everything possible and get the best they had to offer and then use it among ourselves.
- JW: To what extent was being a woman influential [in your maturation process]? Did you feel that it was a disadvantage being a female?
- LS: Hm-m-m. I'm just trying to think. I never thought about that. We were 'dis-advantaged' being Colored.
- JW: The suffragette movement was popular then. Was that discussed?
- LS: Oh, yes, it was discussed. We felt that it was right that we should have. [There were after all] many, many intelligent women all over the world, and they had a right to their opinions, and to express them and vote the way they thought... things should be. Very often it was somewhat contrary to what men thought. Because all through the world, and even so today, women have been pushed aside as not being intelligent enough to hardly blow their own noses. (Chuckle)
- JW: Do you consider yourself, or did you consider yourself a militant women's rights person at that time?
- LS: No. But... I wasn't militant, neither was my family. But we admired those that were.
- JW: Did you ever remember any... I don't know who the leading Negro women were in this period in terms of political rights. Mary McCloud Bethune came along a little later.
- LS: Yes.
- JW: Who was around espousing the Black women's viewpoint?
- LS: They had some political clubs. And, of course, they had some of these, (oh, wait a minute, I'm trying to think...) women who seemed to have time for that sort of thing and just loved it. The Women's Federated Clubs, we always supported them in any project that they were doing. But we didn't just belong... we aided in any way we could and I would sing -- naturally, I was never paid. But we shared whatever talents and whatever things. I've done things like this, put on plays or shows for Federated Clubs and for smaller clubs and for churches and various things to promote talent among young people -- I was young myself,



- LS: the truth was. But I was always, I guess, eager. But we talked about it and we read about it. It was discussed in the home, and we were proud when at last the women received the opportunity to vote.
- JW: Were there marches here?
- LS: Yes, there were. But to me they're quite vague.
- JW: Did you ever have the sense that women were really oppressed or exploited by men, that their talents never were developed adequately because men did not want to see women achieve?
- LS: Well, true. And that was discussed. But in our home we... the women sort of ran the home. (Chuckle) The two men, my uncle Albert Frazier, Clara Frazier's husband, and my father, Al-fred Toomb -- "my Al and your Al" -- they were quite willing that the women should plan the things that were done. They went along with most everything. They were not terrifically forceful, and they admired the women. I think they thought the women were better educated than they were.
- JW: Your father was ill for three years, the first three years of your marriage?
- LS: Yes.
- JW: Were you living at his house at that time?
- LS: We were living at 1612 Baker Street in San Francisco between Pine and Bush. My mother and aunt, two sisters, all that was left of a very large family, and their husbands, and my brother and myself lived in that house. It's still there. It wasn't his house. It really was my aunt's home. But we all lived there together. It was our home.
- JW: Then when you married, your husband moved in with you?
- LS: Well, yes. People did that in those days. They didn't go off to little apartments -- a few rare cases.. but nobody made enough money to do things.. Oh, we'd been married quite a few years and I had three children before we broke away and came across the Bay. But at the time, we had to help one another.
- JW: Did your husband have any problems adjusting to living with your family?
- LS: Yes.
- JW: Do you want to discuss some of them?
- LS: Well... He wasn't very happy about a lot of things, because my family were pretty forceful, the women in my family. And the two men died. The uncle had



LS: an apoplectic stroke about a year after my father, but he passed away in a couple of months. My father lasted for three years -- just absolutely helpless. And it was [quite a strain]. People didn't send their sick to a hospital. We did not have a trained nurse... L.V.N.'s now they call them. But we just called them "helpers" at the time. They came in and helped do things as long as you could afford it. When you couldn't, you did it yourself. And we managed somehow.

People, families, were more closely bound together. Then, of course, as women began to work and young people were graduating from college and business schools and able to get jobs... It's been in the past ten, twenty years that people moved out immediately. Often, almost all of our friends, including ourselves, lived with the family. And you just worked thing out together.

JW: What happened once your mother and aunt were left without husbands? Did that change the life of the family to any degree?

LS: Well... we all just lived along. We just shared.

JW: Your mother lost her husband and then she's going to lose her daughter to marriage and the East Bay. So what did she do then?

LS: Well, there were so many relatives who wanted to come from the country -- little country towns where there was no work -- or friends who... and we had a large house... So she rented rooms. People rented rooms to people. You used the same kitchen and you used the same bathroom and... You got along beautifully. Entirely different than [the present]. You see, people's attitudes were different... That woman there [another member of household previously introduced] that you saw, I think, when you came in, the grey-haired woman... when she was a young woman lived with my mother. She had several rooms and there was a little flat downstairs and that brought in a small income. Things were different. They were not as expensive. And we managed the taxes... and we just shared. We worked things out together.

JW: How did you and your husband acquire your house over here? You moved to Berkeley?

LS: We moved to Berkeley and we rented at first.

JW: When was that decision made? Was that after your father had died?

LS: Oh, yes.

JW: And you had three children?

LS: Yes.

JW: What precipitated the move?



- LS: Well, they were getting to the stage where we needed them to branch out. And my husband was never happy in this situation. It was just one of the things... he didn't make much money at the time. But it was always money that was needed to do these things. Nobody was making money. People made money later. And a few... of course, there are always some people that seem to know what to do with a few pennies. But at last we made that break. Then these other young girls stayed at the house... three or four of them.
- JW: What kind of work was he doing at this time?
- LS: He was in the post office... The San Francisco Post Office.
- JW: What kind of work?
- LS: A carrier. He was a clerk for a while but it kept him at night and it wasn't good for his health. But he felt better being outdoors. So he transferred over to the carrier.
- JW: Was it difficult for a Colored man to get that kind of work then?
- LS: Yes, it was, not that he was "Colored" to look at.
- JW: So he was sort of "passing" on the job?
- LS: N-No. No. He just didn't have that initiative. Other young men had the initiative and go-gettiveness (sic), and he didn't.
- JW: Do you want to discuss his family background a little bit?
- LS: Yes, I can. [Refers back to written notes.] Verner's father, Charles Winfield Scott, was related to the Confederate Winfield Scott. His mother, Anna Baldwin, was one of the younger daughters of the Baldwin household. Verner was the elder son. Then Norris, Maria, and Charles Scott. Maria Scott Ogle still lives in Washington, D.C., a retired school teacher and psychiatric counselor in the D.C. public schools. Verner's name was Verner Baldwin Scott.
- JW: Were you and he the same age?
- LS: No. He was about ten years older.
- JW: Was that unusual?
- LS: No.
- JW: How long were you courting before you married?
- LS: That's quite a story: I was a young girl about twelve. The oldest group of about



- LS: four or five handsome -- oh! terrifically handsome -- young men were sent out... They were working on the road in between going to school. And my aunt's friend in Denver had them come by, since they were coming to San Francisco, and meet us. I came in from school. I was about twelve. Verner was among the group, and apparently he thought I was a nice little girl. I don't think he ever looked at anybody else. He was a man ten years older. But, anyway... and then he was in San Francisco. He came to San Francisco and he joined the post office. He did some other little jobs at the time before that, and then the post office came up and he joined that. So he was around. There were other young girls... he was quite handsome... and other young girls around. But he didn't seem to see any of them.
- JW: What about you? Did you...?
- LS: Well, there were several other I liked. I didn't think much of him at the first. Because he was so serious and kind of... he wasn't a man who made friends easily. But he was very [stable]. He had many other things that I admired as time went on. I could see he had values that some of them lacked. So eventually we did marry, in 1917.
- JW: Your parents were pleased with the match?
- LS: Not too much -- because he had a difficult disposition.
- JW: So did you in some way have to put your foot down and insist on this marriage?
- LS: No, no. They didn't oppose it. You see, my father knew his people in Washington, D.C. Then he was related as a first cousin to George McCard. (The McCard family were a part of that Johnson family that were pioneers.) And the McCards were Washingtonians. (He has a daughter now living here. Her name is Miriam Rogers... Miriam McCard Rogers.) They were well-known and they knew how he was. So the background was such ... His sister visited us and his mother's sister was the Rebecca West who was principal in one of the schools there and she had married Dr. West. She had four children. Dr. John West and Dr. Charles West. The twin daughters were both school teachers and at that time they went to [different colleges]: one girl went to Vassar, one of the twins, and one went to another college. They [Vassar] only accepted one Black girl. She was far from black -- she wasn't black at all. But then the point was, she was known "Colored" and so naturally they went to the Colored schools [in D.C.] and were known "Colored." Verner's sister was very charming... lovable, delightful person -- and still is.
- And, as I say, my father knew the Baldwin family. And, of course, the McCards were our very, very close friends. They lived here in Oakland. So you sort of gravitate toward people with "background." Yes, he had some peculiar ways.



- LS: But he was a very honest and very decent man... a little bit difficult. But I managed.
- JW: How long were you married?
- LS: Well, let me see. He died eight years ago. When was that? He died in 1970.
- JW: So that would mean 53 years?
- LS: Yes. We would have been married sixty years in 1977.
- JW: So your children came pretty rapidly then after you were married.
- LS: Yes. The first boy, Verner Baldwin, Jr... Verner Baldwin Scott, Jr. Let me see... He was born in 1918, May 14th. And then the girl, Avis Robinson Scott, was born October 14, 1919. Then Frazier Toombs Scott was born February 10, 1921.
- JW: You had only three children?
- LS: Three.
- JW: How did... Was that just a decision -- I don't know if people went about deciding how many children they were going to have? Or they just came?
- LS: Well, we decided that's enough.
- JW: Were there ways to prevent having more children in those days?
- LS: Yes. Sometimes they didn't work as well as they do now. But they didn't have the Pill, and they didn't have some other things. But we managed somehow... to avoid. (Chuckle)
- JW: Was it something you had to keep secret, or was it something that women in general knew about?
- LS: Oh, I guess they knew about it. But... And then a cousin of mine who lived in Red Bluff... this is a small town... and she was associated with a number of school teachers and town folk. She sewed for them. So they would tell her things.
- JW: And then she would tell you things?
- LS: Oh, yes.
- JW: School teachers, I guess, in that period, the women, were not allowed to marry, is that right?
- LS: That's right. Up until, oh, quite a while. Of course, they have been marrying now for some time. You know, that was too funny: In the East where so many of



- LS: our particular friends and all were teaching, when the news came out that they would be allowed to marry, there were more announcements of marriage. (Laughs) Everybody knew that it should have been announced a long time ago. (Chuckle)
- JW: So teachers married secretly?
- LS: Yes.
- JW: What did they do when the children came?
- LS: Well, I guess in those days when children came, they'd just have to step out. I think it was quite the style not to have any. Because it meant... After you're used to two salaries coming in, it's not easy to give it up. And there weren't the other outlets.
- JW: That seems an awful sacrifice to have to make for a career. You either had... There was no blending then... You couldn't be a teacher and a mother in most school systems. You had to be absolutely one or the other?
- LS: Yes. It was stupid! Because as any of them taught [talked] there were so many frustrated women. (Men are not frustrated. They don't have to be.) But there were so many frustrated women. Often the "old-maid school teacher," they used to call them, they'd go through a cranky period. You don't have that so much anymore because people live more normal lives; they are more relaxed, and it's a natural thing. And I think that our teachers are equally capable, in fact, much more so -- without being so cranky and cross. Because they were so irritable; they were so frustrated.
- JW: Did you attempt to raise your children as you had been raised or did you have different aspirations for them?
- LS: Well, I tried to raise them as I had been raised because it was the style still to do that. Many of the people began to loosen up a little. And I tried to loosen up a little and be a little normal, with moving times, though my children tell me I wasn't. (Chuckle) They get sick of having me say, "Well, when I was a child, we did so-and-so." They say, "Don't mention that again!" (Chuckle) You know you can be a perfect pain as you grow older. (Chuckle)
- JW: Did you and your husband agree about how to raise children or did he have different ideas?
- LS: No, he thought the same. He had good ideas about what they should do and what they shouldn't do. That they should be well-educated and prepared for the opening up of many things that were happening as they grew up, different than when he was young.
- JW: What were the major occupations that each one went on to achieve?
- LS: Well, the main occupations that young Colored people could find to do were in



LS: professions, like the medical professions, dentistry and so forth, or in school teaching. Some were being successful in law. And one of his [son's?] friends that came out at that time, went back home to Louisiana and married a very beautiful girl and they had their children and they... he got into the insurance business. That was a build-up because, you see, the Metropolitan and many of the other insurances would not give life insurance to the Black people. So then they had independent life insurance companies that built up there. And some of our young people here began to learn. Then some developed banks, because they, [White establishments] wouldn't loan money to men to develop small businesses and buy little homes in the South. Here it was a little easier.

As I say, the West and the North were nasty in a subtle sort of way and socially, of course -- it [true integration?] was a no-no. Nobody wanted it anyway. But, we had our own very nice affairs with our own fine class of people. They didn't know that we didn't want them. (Chuckle) But however that may be...

The aim of young people, of course, was always to go to college and prepare themselves for something they could do. Of course, in later years business administration and other social fields have opened up so that they are not limited to the medical fields and school teaching. Because there are a lot of people who aren't teachers really and they don't really love it. And some do.

JW: What did Verner Jr. end up doing?

LS: Well, he didn't end up doing anything too much. Because out of high school... He loved the sea, and he had a great [yearning to travel. He got a job and sailed around the world twice].

..... END TAPE

BEGIN TAPE 3:4:1

LS: The Second World War came on, he was [in] the first group to be chosen to go out of Berkeley. We were living in Berkeley at the time. He was in the first group of boys to be taken. Well... So, he didn't get a chance to go on to college. He really... Both of my boys were artists. His would have been more commercial art, and he wanted to go into creative engraving and had it all set up. Then, this, of course, happened -- the Second World War.

Then the younger boy [Frazier] was a musician. He loved... When he was in junior high even, men would bring him pieces to arrange, say, for a twelve, fourteen, sixteen piece band. He's spread it out all over the floor and just jot it down as fast as he could. He really had an amazing talent.



LS: But his main talent was cartooning. From the time he was in kindergarten his teacher that we knew... and my brother went to the same school, you know, this Emerson School in San Francisco. She called up so excited, and I wondered what... "Come down, Lora, I want you to see something!" So I went down to the school. And there over the board he had cartooned... oh, I don't know, the whole story or whatever it was that they had given him... had read to them, I suppose. So she was an art student and she was just captivated. So she had it arranged that he would go to the San Francisco School of Fine Arts, which used to be where the Mark Hopkins Hotel is. It was called the Mark Hopkins Institute. They started there but then they moved down further downtown, and he went there on a scholarship.

Though he was taught the fine art principles, he was still a cartoonist at heart. He could always see the funny things in people. He could also... When people would come in, friends of mine would come in, you know, at three or four in the afternoon or to play cards or whatever time-wasting things women did in those days -- why... [Son criticizing a guest:] "How could you kiss that woman?" Why, he could just map out her personality and character just like that, and he was just a little teenage twelve or thirteen-year-old boy. And, "She's just as dishonest as she can be! How can you stomach her?" (Chuckle) And so forth. Well, anyway, he went on.

JW: Was he embarrassing at times?

LS: Oh, he didn't say that until after they had gone. Oh, no, he didn't do anything like that.

JW: But they must have been aware that he watched them and was amused by them.

LS: I don't think that they even paid any attention. They didn't know... that he was just sitting there. The year that he was twelve, he grew to be six feet. We called him so lazy and we scolded him. He was never very well. In fact, he had a tubercular bug from childhood. Where he got it, nobody knows. It didn't affect any of the other children. He had had treatment, and been put to bed when he was a little fellow, for months of a time and all. They didn't have the ways, anti-biotics and things that they use nowadays. But he managed to struggle through with his life and his poor health.

When the War broke out and they were going to take these young fellows, a teacher from Tech High came to us, to the house. He said, "I come because I know that Frazier is too delicate and this will not be good, but they are going to take them if they're..." Like one of the sons, Verner, the younger son, said, "As long as you're warm and breathing, they'll take you -- no matter what's wrong with you. They don't go into that deeply and are not too selective. Because you are going to be cannon fodder, anyway." So anyway he... They were developing out at St. Mary's College an officer's training school, and they were going to have



LS: a Colored band. So Frazier was a trombonist and an arranger. And a number of other young fellows from around here got the chance. They were stationed there. He said, "If you... if he will... what do you do when you do not wait for the draft?"

JW: Volunteer?

LS: Volunteer... He said, "I've got the list here." It was Trutner. He used to be the director of the band that played down at the Lake at that time. (Of course, he's dead now.) He said, "Frazier is so talented. Have him sign up." He made all of the arrangements and took these boys' names in. So he said, "If they sign up, they will be there for the whole war. They will never be moved." So that's how he happened not to have to go, which was a blessing. But, anyway, as life went on and jobs were hard to get and all, the adjustment after a war, he did join the Army because he was going [hoped] to go to that school in Washington, D.C. for band men. It was a free opportunity.

Well, he never got to go for some reason. And they sent him down to Okinawa. There he got spinal meningitis. Well, they brought him home. With a combination... The TB just grew. He was sent to Denver to that hospital there. He was there, oh, a year, I guess. Then they discharged him. He went to arts school and worked on his arranging... people would come and have him do that sort of thing.

Then he had friends, artist friends, down in Mexico. The War was over and they urged him to come down there. So he went down to Mexico, but not out in the country. He said he couldn't take it. It was just too primitive. But he went into Mexico City. There he met a man, a White man, who took a very fatherly interest in him. He had a radio station. So he did a lot of work there. Frazier collected the cleverest cartoons, Mexican cartoons, and his own, and sent them all over the world. He had quite a business going.

JW: Was he fluent in Spanish?

LS: No, he wasn't, but he learned.

JW: Was this man who took him in as a protégé, was he Mexican or American?

LS: No, he was White. He was an American, from California, strange as it may seem, down in the Valley someplace. And so then, anyway... Where was I?

JW: He was sending cartoons...

LS: Yes, and he was doing good work there. But he became quite ill. So he belonged to the -- What is it? -- the Veterans...?

JW: Of Foreign Wars?

LS: Yes. They had an organization down there -- a very healthy, strong one. They put him in the hospital, but he was put in the Mexican hospital. It was out of



LS: Mexico City, called San Raquel. It was a very, very lovely suburb... delightful. So he was out there and this Spanish doctor worked on him. In fact, a group did.

And I didn't hear from him for so long and I wrote a scolding letter not realizing that he'd been completely out for about six months. Then he came back to himself and they found his identifications and so forth and contacted me. I went down to see him. He was so glad. We enjoyed a very nice time together, and I stayed there several weeks. Later this doctor thought they had cured him. But they did tell me, the group, that if one drop of that poison [touched his brain, it would kill him]. They had to drain off quarts of this pus from the spine... But, anyway, they thought they had cured him. He got so much better. So this doctor thought that he had developed something to help others. And he came here to the University of California to read his paper.

It was in the medical magazine.

But he [Frazier] got another apartment and was doing a good business in Mexico City -- between the two, arranging for bands and the cartoons that he did, his own cartoons, and others. It was the second of January. He had paid all his bills and he was at one of the Mexican friends' homes listening to tapes of his [arrangements]... to see if there was something that he wanted to change... and was taken ill right there. They knew about the hospital. So they got him out there the best way they could. They were little folks and he was six feet four. (Chuckle) But they managed. I guess they got an ambulance -- I don't know what they did -- but they got him out there. The doctors worked on him all afternoon. They couldn't do a thing. So they phoned me, and they said, "We have done everything we could think of, and nothing worked. And he passed away. So, anyway, we went down, my daughter and I.

JW: What year was this?

LS: I'm sorry. I can't remember exactly.

JW: Was it in the Sixties or the Fifties?

LS: It was in the Sixties. I'll have to check that out.

JW: He was in his forties?

LS: No, he wasn't. He was about 35.

JW: So, it was in the Fifties.

LS: Yes, it was in the Fifties, because it's been quite some time ago. (I'll... It is my fault [that I don't have such dates at hand].) As I said, he [the younger son, Verner, Jr.] also was talented in art and had hoped to do things. But before he



LS: got a chance to do anything about it, he was hustled off to war. Well, he was down in New Guinea. And he went back and forth to Australia because he knew quite a bit about Australia because he had traveled around the world a couple of times. He had friends in Australia, Melbourne, particularly.

Later he was in the Air-Sea Rescue Service... One of the last letters I got from him he was describing a battle. He said it was like all the fireworks you had ever seen before on the ocean. And they stood by. All right, then shortly after that letter, we received word that he was "missing." He was killed: Some stupid officer took a group of them to go into rescue a couple of American flyers who were down on the island of Mapia, M-a-p-i-a, about a couple of hundred miles off New Guinea and he... they were shot. [Break.] It was controlled by the Japanese, and they were shot down and killed on the beach as they came on. It was a stupid thing! You know they could do some stupid things, because that wasn't a sensible thing to do... So anyway, he was killed. He was among those killed that day. And for a long time he was listed "missing." Then at last... After the War was over, they went [to the island] and found the clothing and the bloodstained things and his identifications and all. They boxed them up and sent them to me. And I have them here. So anyway, that was that. And the odd part about it, my husband's brother's wife was in the Civil Service some place in Washington, and she phoned me, and she said, "It's my job to write about Verner." She said, "Isn't that odd? It came to my desk." So she sent me the details as she had copied them. They sent it to me, also, and then she sent it. But she said, "Isn't this the oddest thing that I should get it?"

Now the daughter was in the middle. She is Avis Robinson Scott. (Of course, her name is Ward now.) That's her daughter [in the photograph] over there, and that's her first husband, Crawford Thomason. She had two children: Norman Crawford Thomason and Janice Maria -- after Verner's sister, a lovely, lovely person -- she's just a darling. Then later she married Ralph Ward and had two children: Claudia Diane Ward and Philip Stanley Ward.

JW: Is he the person I met the last time I was here?

LS: Yes. Yes, he's one of the new generation. (Chuckle)

JW: In the time that we have left, could we discuss a little bit about the churches and their place and role in the community? Which faith were you raised in?

LS: Well, we went to the Methodist church, Bethel, when we were all young in San Francisco. I was about fifteen when the whole family joined the Episcopal Church because that was the church of the Eastern part of the family. My father's sister and all of the other relatives were Episcopalian. So we joined that. Because many of the ways of the Black churches didn't appeal to us particularly, because we attended any church we felt like and we enjoyed them, mostly because we wanted to hear good choirs and fine singing and excellent sermons and our tastes were a little different from some of the ways Colored churches were... carried on in those



- LS: days. However, we had many good friends among them and many good friends among the ministers. We helped and we did whatever you know, we supported many things, because we recognized what it came from and what they had to appeal to, the type of thing. But it didn't appeal to us, so we joined St. Augustine's Episcopal Church on this side of the Bay.
- JW: Is this the one on Telegraph Avenue?
- LS: Well, it was at 27th and West at the time. In fact, it was down on Eighth and something at the time in one of the other churches, because we were just a mission at the time. But we had... there was a very nice young man, David Wallace... Father Wallace. He was a very fine young man. He conducted that church for a long, long time.
- JW: Were all... Were the members of the church Black?
- LS: Oh, yes.
- JW: Were they mostly West Indian or American?
- LS: They were a combination. Many West Indians, but it was a combination. Many of our friends... Because many of their backgrounds in the East, where they came from, were Episcopal. We often went to the Cathedral [Grace], and to different Episcopal churches here in San Francisco. There were lovely ones. But, we just went as visitors. But this was our own church and we had many friends there and still do. Then, of course, we built a place at 27th and West. At that time that was a very nice part of Oakland. It's now quite older, and many changes, and businesses encroached around there. Then we had the opportunity to sell that and go up to 29th and Telegraph, to Trinity. It was called Trinity then, it's now called St. Augustine. But that was a very select church at the time. And it has quite a number of possibilities -- a large parish house and a large gymnasium and things to be used as the money comes along to develop it.
- JW: Would you say that the churches in the early part of this century or in the early part of your life... what kinds of attitudes did they encourage in people? Did they encourage people to be complacent and accept their role or place in society? Or did it encourage people to be concerned about the poor and to fight against discrimination?
- LS: Yes. They taught us to struggle for recognition and to not give way and to work for the accomplishment and better treatment and opportunities both in business and schooling and social contacts or whatever, and to overcome discrimination.
- JW: Was Father Wallace one of these kinds of people?
- LS: Yes.



JW: Do you think that you were particularly religious?

LS: Oh, yes. I always have been.

JW: In other words, you went to church regularly and...?

LS: Yes. Regularly. I trained choirs, and taught Sunday School. My husband was superintendent. We were very deeply interested and concerned.

JW: ~~But~~ aside from the social side of church, what about the church's doctrine about the Afterlife and prayer and other things that you were supposed to accept in the church?

LS: Well, truthfully... I have an aunt, my father's brother's wife, was a Christian Scientist. On vacations I often spent time down in San Jose with them. So I sent my children to Christian Science Sunday School and I had many reasons for using practitioners and that sort of thing to bolster my own feelings, both healthwise and psychologically. Truthfully, some of the ritual and some of the forms do not penetrate into my deepest feelings. I like Unity. I attended because it was close... also... this Church of Religious Science. That type of thing appeals to me, because it seems to deeply reach in where some of the cut and dried just plain Protestant feeling doesn't. And, of course, the shouting and the carrying-on of a certain group of people in some of the other Protestant churches had no appeal to me whatsoever. However, I have worked in them and trained their choirs and helped in Sunday School, wherever it was necessary, wherever I happened to be. But with a grain of salt, I appreciated and deeply enjoyed Christian Science or Unity. In fact, in later years, I have enjoyed Unity more, because it's more relaxing.

JW: What would you say was the general quality of ministers in the Black community? Were these people who deserved and received respect? [Interruption.]

LS: They weren't educated, and they didn't always put the words in the right places, some of them. Some of them were very good. Some of them were modestly educated, and they could use a dictionary. (Chuckle) But I'm talking about Methodist and Baptist churches. Of course, Father Wallace was well-educated from the seminary... Episcopal.

JW: Did you ever have an opportunity... When is the first time that you left California?

LS: Oh, I always longed to travel and longed to go, but I never got a chance until just... I went to Mexico, twice -- first when my son was sick and later when he died. I did get a chance to make a trip to Washington a few years ago. And that's the only traveling I've done except around -- just locally in California. But I've always longed to travel, and I've always wanted to go to Europe and to see other parts of the world. But something always ate up the money that I had planned to use for myself. I never got a chance to use it for me. (Chuckle)



LS: But I guess that's life.

JW: I think we'll stop for the day because we all seem to have someplace to go.

LS: Yes, because I've got to go...

..... END TAPE

BEGIN TAPE 4:4:1 (THIRD SESSION - NOVEMBER 6, 1978)

JW: Where did the idea originate that there was a need for a community center?

LS: After the First World War, there was money left over from the... Oh, what did they call it?... the entertainment of the soldiers and so forth.

JW: USO.

LS: USO. And I used to help in that. Well, then there was quite a bit left over. The War ended a little unexpectedly and so all of the boys went home, wherever they belonged. With this money that was left over, they developed in San Francisco, I don't know where else, recreation centers. And one, ours, the Booker T. Washington one, was on Divisadero Street, I think it's between Post and Geary, or Geary and O'Farrell. (It wasn't far. It was in walking distance from where we lived.) We really started in a very, very simple way. There was an old bakery on Divisadero Street and we used that building. It was a two-story building, and we used that building. Our stage was where the ovens were.

JW: Was there any opposition to you buying the building?

LS: Oh, yes. They acted ridiculous about it. You know, it was the thing to do at that time. There was a man -- you'll laugh at this -- who, (I forget his name, but anyway), he was trying to get some political position and came to our door on Baker Street. And when he told what he was interested in, why I serenaded him with the fact that I wouldn't vote for him if he was the last man on earth! Because he was opposed and was representing the people who were opposed to Booker Washington Center there on Divisadero which was a business street, simple businesses. As time went on, it offered many pleasant opportunities to... for recreational activities for boys and girls and for adults.

We had... after a while, after a year or so, we had a very nice young woman who was trained in social work -- Ethel Clark -- who came out and took charge. And from there it really developed into something very interesting. They had a choral group that did a very nice job. She was quite an excellent musician. Then many other things... and because of her education and degrees, she was eligible to move with the group who had inspired these centers located in various positions in San Francisco. The money that they paid was laughable nowadays.



- LS: But, anyway, there was that little bit left and they gave to us who helped [out] a small pittance, you know. But I had the young people for dramatics and dancing and little plays and that sort of thing. We had a lot of fun.
- JW: Why was the decision made to establish this Center rather than fighting to integrate the YMCA or some of the other places?
- LS: I don't know, because it didn't belong to the YMCA. Or it was a separate activity. It was a recreation center, and there were several of them placed through the city in various neighborhoods.
- JW: Were Colored people welcome at the other centers?
- LS: Possibly. I don't know. If they lived in that neighborhood, possibly so. But it just so happened that they delegated it that way. Of course, things have changed now, but this was before the change, you know. Some few things have improved since "Black Power" or "White Power" and all of the different activities that have developed. But there wasn't that much integration of people in activities of certain kinds. That didn't mean that if you lived in that neighborhood that possibly you could not participate in a public recreational center.
- JW: I've heard that at one time the mortgage taxes weren't paid or some kind of situation developed where there was a threat of evicting people from that Center. Do you remember?
- LS: Possibly so, I don't... Maybe vaguely I do. I think I do vaguely. It just comes back. You know it's been many years...
- JW: Where did people entertain themselves before the Center was built?
- LS: Oh, we had little clubs. And for young people parents of the same general attitudes got together and saw to it that their young people had little dances back and forth in the homes and occasionally...
- JW: But there was no public place... there was no public centralized place where Colored people... other than the churches?
- LS: Well, no, but there were halls that you rented from time to time to have a party or [meeting]. But no specific one. No, why, it hadn't developed that far. See, things have changed a great deal. But we had homes. Young people had nice times and they enjoyed it. I was one of the young people. (Chuckle) And we had nice times and we had nice friends and the parents were there. Then later some young men developed a club called the Limited Club and they gave a formal once or twice a year, which we all enjoyed.

Then after we married, some of us got together and had a little club. It got started at my house. The idea of having a little club, drawing the young women,



- LS: young matrons, together... And we were chattering, as women do, trying to find a name. And some of us said -- I can't remember whether it was me or somebody else -- said, "Well, we all sound like a lot of chatterboxes." So that's how that club got its name. It was called the Chatterbox Club. We got together monthly, having little cards or some simple recreation, and had a nice formal once a year and, oh, often did little... made little arrangements for children at Christmas time and that sort of thing... poor children... baskets and that sort of thing, for those less fortunate. Then, of course, as time went on, life made many changes. People drifted to different places and that just dissipated itself. But it was fun while it lasted.
- JW: Do you remember any kind of discrimination in connection with the Sutro Baths?
- LS: I don't remember, because I wasn't a swimmer. But I think I've heard that there was some discrimination at Sutro Baths out there near the Cliff House.
- JW: There was a story that was told to me about Bobby Evans who was a contestant in a swim contest and his school was not allowed to enter because they wouldn't let a Colored boy swim.
- LS: Oh, that was ridiculous. Yes, I knew Bobby. I knew his mother and her sisters and his grandmother and his father.
- JW: Do you remember this story?
- LS: No.
- JW: Was it the same story with Fleischacker Pool?
- LS: I don't think so, but maybe so. I don't think so... Now maybe I'm behind the times. You see, I was living over here by the time that Fleischacker was built, and though we went back and forth... no, maybe I wasn't. But even so, I wasn't a swimmer and my children were too little at the time. Maybe I didn't... it wasn't on my mind. But it could have been because, you see, they were very nasty. Things have made great changes in the last twenty years. But that was a long time ago.
- JW: Were there any special problems that people encountered in dealing with the police department?
- LS: Now I don't know much about that for the simple reason that the people we knew never had anything to do with the police. They were just nice people. We didn't have this set of drug addicts and so forth who were always getting in trouble. Oh, I guess, a man who was a perpetual drunkard. But we didn't know any of them. They were completely unrelated to anything we had to do with. We didn't know anybody like that.
- JW: So the police weren't any special problem then?
- LS: Well, no. Nowadays they are a special problem, and they have been so cruel



LS: and so harsh on these young people, old or young. But this is a new thing... that it's so widely spoken about. We knew that they weren't treated the best... possibly... but we didn't hear too much about it. Maybe if it was someone that we knew that had a relative that was badly treated, we would think about it, and feel sorry about it. But there was not too much of that going on. You see, this [was] fifty or sixty years ago.

We were law-abiding people. We were people who had come out of great tribulation, with the idea of getting to California where things were supposed to be a little freer, and building a home and working and putting children through school. You were so busy doing that, you didn't get into mischief. It was a rare thing. You didn't hear of thievery and all these things that are going on today that would cause people to be exposed to the police.

JW: Let's turn to people that came in during the [Second World] War. I know you were living on this side of the Bay. But when were you first aware that there were all of these new people coming in from the South primarily?

LS: Well, my mother and aunt lived in San Francisco at the home place on Baker Street, so I was back and forth. I gave music lessons over there. I still had some old students, because I hadn't been here too long. And I was on the streetcar going out toward the Mission because there were several out in that area, and a lady said to me, "Don't you think that some of these new Colored folks that came in are sort of different from anybody you have ever seen?" Well, I didn't really notice that too much.

But people were telling me about the people who... women, you know, just anybody who came to work in the shipyards -- doing work that we never thought a woman would dream of being able to consider doing. They were really something. They would go in in their workclothes, say, the Emporium, (that was sort of an important store at the time. There were other fancier stores). But they would go in and want to try on clothes unkempt, unbathed, and so forth. And, of course, that caused a little flurry. Because you can't try on things unless you are properly prepared to try on clean, new clothes. Nobody else could use them if you have permed them. (Laughter)

JW: How did they change San Francisco, or how did they change the Negro community?

LS: Speak up.

JW: How did they change the Negro community? What effect did all of these people have on the community that was already here?

LS: Well, we didn't think too much about it. We didn't come in contact with them, really. We had our homes and we lived quietly. We didn't come in contact with them too much. It was more recently, in these recent years, that we have... since they've done so much restoration of we'll say West Oakland and sections of San Francisco and Hunter's Point -- where I've never been, but I've heard about it.



LS: And those people kept coming and coming... We just had no association with them much, because we didn't know about them. Now we are meeting them, and when they tore down the places around West Oakland, where so many people settled, strangers and new people. It was sort of off-limits. Now they are living next door to you.

They have brought into our schools, unfortunately, a very sad situation... because they don't want to learn anything and they don't want you to. And if you do, then they'll beat you up when they get on the outside. I had a lovely student who was a very accomplished pianist. Her mother put her in Holy Names High School here, which was very elite during the past. But now, of course, there were many other... now that was a Catholic school -- I'm using that as a sample. Her mother put her there because they were supposed to have a good music course. They were getting ready to put on "The Messiah" with their school choral group and she was going to do the accompanying... a little girl about fourteen. She had long hair. It wasn't straight hair or anything, but it was long. She was a pretty brown girl. And they tried to cut her hair off. They frightened her so. They told her, "We'll get you!" The report cards came out and she had mostly A's... She was used to doing that way. It was expected from her parents. They [threatened to] beat her up after school.

JW: Are these other kids at Holy Names?

LS: These are Colored kids. You see, that school never even accepted a Colored student over a period of fifty, sixty, maybe a hundred years, I don't know. And it was a very elite school. So, the girl was so frightened that her mother moved her to another school in Berkeley where she got along very nicely. It's a girl's school to begin with. I'm just using that as a sample.

Now I have ladies who come in, school teachers who bring their children or who study with me themselves... this lovely, lovely lady who teaches in the Berkeley school up near the Claremont Hotel; (she was selected for that school and then Berkeley began busing). So they brought the children so they could get the experience of meeting children who were better equipped, possibly, to inspire them to do better work. So she saw several little children who were not quite up to what they [the more advantaged students] were doing and she sent a note home to the mother. She said she would like for her to come and discuss the little child's lessons and see "if we could do something about it to help." So she set the time, and the woman came with a knife, and was going to stab her! That was the attitude. She was so shocked -- because this woman had taught in the South. She was a personal friend of Martin Luther King and his family. She was a highly respected teacher, and she was teaching in a Berkeley school... This is only one case, but I've heard many others. I'm just using her as an example. When they were making an exchange, the Berkeley School Department chose her to go up and teach in this school. And at that time quite an ultra group of people, their children were going there. So, anyway, she got along beautifully; she's an excellent teacher. And this really did floor her.



LS: Then my sister-in-law... of course, that has nothing to do with this... after the First World War, when that influx of people came into Washington, D.C., I guess you know, and New York and Philadelphia and all that Eastern seaboard -- the teachers made themselves almost into social workers, to go into the homes and try to help those people and show them what to do. And, (Chuckle) you'll laugh. Something was said about sending your child to school clean, and see that she was bathed. Let's see, how does it go? They tell the story. It's very funny: "I said for you to teach her, not to smell her!" (Chuckle) That is not the way it was put. It was much more humorous. But I'm not good at repeating things. (Chuckle) But anyway, that's the attitude, and that's the attitude here.

Now into the high schools it's very pathetic. Now Oakland High School was a very choice high school, out on Park Boulevard. Of course, it's been degraded. Technical here on College Avenue... a lovely school. Many of our young people went to these schools and were highly respected and made excellent credits. My own children went there. But in recent years you'd be shocked to see the kind of students that are milling around there. And I doubt that there's more than a hand full of White children in the school. I don't know where they send them, but they are not there. And you can't blame them. I wouldn't send mine there either. (Chuckle) That's awful to say. But, after all, you want your child to do its best and not emulate something that isn't good for them.

JW: You have this [very large wall mirror in gilded frame] mirror in here from Viola Smith. Is that where you acquired it?

LS: No. This mirror was out of a home on Pine Street, Pine and Laguna, between Laguna and Octavia. Mammy Pleasant had put her niece and her husband in this home. It's a beautiful old home, Victorian type. My aunt always admired this mirror and, oh, a number of other things -- articles that she had acquired. So when the crash came -- all of a sudden, something must have happened. You know, people do become senile after a while. Mammy Pleasant had maneuvered and manipulated and had really gotten rich.

JW: You're talking about Mrs. Pleasant?

LS: I'm talking about Mammy Pleasant. I never knew her, of course, naturally. I don't know whether my aunt had ever seen her. But she was notorious. And she was connected with so many people that she heard how to invest. Then she was in-the-know of many of those wealthy people who committed criminal acts of various kinds, shady business deals and so forth. So she blackmailed them... and to keep this thing going. So when this friend of my aunt's, her name was Mrs. Gordon -- no relation to Sis -- when she saw that things were going to fall apart and they were foreclosing on Mrs. Pleasants right and left, she called my aunt and, oh, I guess for just a paltry little sum she gave her that mirror and some other things. The friend did. Then they [the Gordons] moved out into a nice neighborhood flat. We had lovely flats over there, six and seven rooms. You don't have them anymore -- Everything is so small. But large rooms. And people often lived in them for years, because they were comfortable and easily located. I think they



- LS: were living on Divisadero near Page in San Francisco around near McAllister and that area. So, anyway, this mirror... so we've treasured it.
- JW: What was your niece's name?
- LS: Her niece?
- JW: The niece that you are referring to.
- LS: Yes. I think I told you about her before. Her name was Mrs. Gordon. She later... Gordon died, but she had three daughters. They were named Marie, India, and Hortense. And they all lived together. Now then, where Viola Smith came into the picture... Some sort of mystery always surrounded her birth. And one of these men paid... promised to pay his wife I think \$50,000 everytime she would have a child. Well, it's a question where that child came from. But, anyway, the child was brought... They were into mining and gold mining and all that sort of thing going on. So... I don't know the true story. My aunt knew it. But anyway, this little baby, somehow or other a nurse or somebody dropped it. And she always had this lame hip. She walked on crutches all of her life. But money was prepared for her to take music...

END TAPE

BEGIN TAPE 4:4:2

- LW: Mammy Pleasants, I think, brought this child to Mrs. Gordon to care for. I think all of the child's life, some money was available to help Viola Smith. She was my first music teacher. She grew up in the Catholic church. She played for them and for various things. She was a very gentle, sweet soul. In those days you went to the students' house to give them lessons instead of them coming to you. So she came to the house each week and we took our lessons. But she was a lovely, sweet person. She grew up in that household with Mrs. Gordon's girls. Mrs. Gordon later married another man named Boone.
- JW: Was there ever any suggestion that she was Mammy Pleasant's daughter?
- LS: Not that... I don't think so. No, this was another story. If my aunt were alive, she could really tell it. I can hear it in the back of my mind, but I'm not sure enough of it to quote it. [Mrs. Gordon, later Boone, was Mammy Pleasant's niece.]
- JW: What was Mrs. Pleasant's reputation? What did you hear about her?
- LS: Well, you see, it was history when I was old enough to hear about it. But she was quite a notorious woman. She came out here from the South, I think Louisiana, in those early days. She knew how to forge ahead. And she had a personality apparently that attracted people. She got in with these rich families and then she developed, oh, a number of things. She had her finger in a number of things. I think she conducted several houses of ill repute (Chuckle). And she had houses in the country and so forth where these rich folks could go and have a nice time,



LS: with somebody other than their wives, or vice versa. So all of these mixed up babies and all of these things that came along. She was involved in quite a mysterious situation. Now I can't quote it. There is a book, which is pretty good, but it isn't that good.

JW: Oh, the one by Helen Holdredge?

LS: Yes, it isn't that good. My aunt said, "Oh, it's really fictionized." Because she knew the story because she was so closely associated with her friend. (I can't remember her first name.)

JW: In an earlier interview you said that during the first years of your marriage you were suffering from "physical and spiritual exhaustion." What did you mean by that?

LS: Well. I thought I was going to be a singer -- ha! ha! I was born fifty, sixty years too soon. If I were in this age, I'd have had it made. And the young people in this age, if you're ready, and have really prepared yourself in competition. I don't care what color you are, competition is keen. You have to be better than the rest.

But, however that may be, I married. Had three children. Meantime, we had three paralyzed invalids. We didn't have Medicare. We didn't have many of these hospital insurances or anything of the sort. You took care of that sort of condition in the home. And we struggled to do it, all of us together -- my mother and myself. And until the money ran out, we had a lady, a friend of ours, come in and help bathe and do some of these things. It was really... We were so exhausted, yes, that there was no time for study and no time for anything, and I wasn't getting... I was growing older then.

So then as I explained to you in one of the other talks, I wanted to get started again. I started to study and made arrangements with a teacher, and complained that I was... was making excuses for not having a good lesson. She said, "Why don't you think of teaching and schedule all of your study toward helping others?" Well, that wasn't what I wanted. I was still young. But, thinking it over... she said, it was a very respectable way to make a living -- taking care of your own family and these other problems that have come to you. So I did. And that's how I came around to this. And I've found it pretty good.

Of course, I'd never get rich, because at that time we were paid so little, and half the time people didn't pay. They just thought they could get away with it. If you trained choirs or trained young people for little programs and things, they never thought of giving you ten cents. They didn't think that one deserved any money, you know. So you'd never get rich, unless you were smart, and I wasn't.  
(Chuckle)



[Taken in part from written notes:]

LS: My great grandfathers were despised as Northern sympathizers. They weren't really. But the older James Logan, the father of these two men, had arranged that the children born of slave parents, their fathers were (supposed) to buy their freedom, before they were born. Then Logan would go into court and proclaim that they were free-born. So all these children were free-born. Another thing he did was: any of the young men -- especially those who were octoroons or a sixteenth part Negro -- which is more than an octoroon -- over a period of many years, as they became eighteen, he gave them a horse and bridle, a suit of clothes and five hundred dollars to go North and make something of their lives. It was his attitude, though he had been a slaveholder. So as these came on, these young people were born free. They didn't go anywhere; there was nowhere to go. But his treatment of them was different than some other people's, so my grandmother said. He didn't believe in concubinage. If you were going to cohabit, then you must marry. So these two brothers married these two sisters whose mother was supposed to be White. (That's a long story. I never did give it to you. But I'll try and get it all written, so if you ever want to use it some time, why, we can.)

Now, so as I said before, there was much trouble as the Logans were despised as Northern sympathizers. They weren't really, but they were trying to make a change. There were a lot of other [White] people down there that were trying to make a change, so they say, though it's hard for us to believe it with all of the other unkind things that happened to our people. However, things became so very serious that he had to get the young people out, and his children. He sent them in charge of his brother, Pleasant Dixon Logan, with his own family. They joined a wagon train that was bound for California. They had to hurry. They did it in the dark of night, really. Then James Logan, who was the lawyer, took his older son to Philadelphia and placed him in school where he would have a proper education, as he was uncertain what educational facilities California offered in those early days.

James, Sr., returned to finish the business, pack his household goods, and get ready to take the spring wagon train to California. When that wagon train arrived [in the West] expecting him, the bad news came with it that he had been killed from ambush [back in Missouri] by angry, very bitterly angry people who resented his attitude... (Well, I've already told you that.)

It took six months to cross the Plains by wagon train. There were many stops for illness, births, death. Minerva's sister, Cynthia, gave birth to Robert, her second child, during the long trek. Minerva brought three small children, Thomas (I don't know how old), Clara Ann, about three to four years old, and James, about two years old. After many vicissitudes and dangers, threatened attacks by Indians...

On one occasion near the close of day, the grouped wagon train was surrounded by a band of Indians on horseback. They peered through the wagon flaps and saw Black faces, calling them "book-ras," meaning Blacks. The Indians moved away a few paces, held a parley, returned and circled about the wagon, shot a few cattle and left. The wagon train master said the presence of several wagons of Negroes saved that whole party [because the Indians assumed that the Blacks were fugitive slaves and sympathized with their plight].



LS: About three days later, the wagon train entered a pass in the mountains and planned to camp and rest and repair their wagons. Before they could settle or make any plans, the group came upon many wagons and discovered a horrible massacre. The men set about burying the dead -- men, women and children. Seated on the ground was one woman with an arrow in her back, bent over. They found a baby boy sheltered in her lap still alive. My grandmother, Minerva Logan, took the little fellow and brought him to California with her own children.

It was early winter, with the snow swirling, as the brave band crossed the Sierras into California, at last landing at North San Juan in Nevada County. That winter (1859 to 1860) was one of the bitterest winters. My grandmother saw with despair her cattle starve and freeze to death unsheltered. When spring arrived at last and the first wagon train came through bearing the heart-breaking news of her husband, James Logan, having been shot from ambush, the grief-stricken young widow knew not where to turn with four youngsters to care for and feed.

Bravely, she took the children and the remnant of her cattle to the mountain meadows to graze. She spent the summer making butter. One of her best customers was a young man named William Robinson who ran a hotel of sorts for miners, sheepherders and travelers in North San Juan. In November of 1862, Minerva married William Robinson. They had three children: a son, William, born August 23, 1863; Laura Minerva, October 30, 1865; and Elavinia, May 1, 1868.

My grandfather, William Robinson, felt this rough mining town was not the right place to rear children, so moved to a busy little town, Red Bluff, in Tehama County situated on the Sacramento River. He bought a block of land and built a home. He opened a restaurant where he served the businessmen, lawyers, judges and elite of that little town. He always kept a table in the back for the town drunkard and miners and sheepherders down on their luck. He ran his business until he became quite ill and died November 28, 1894.

In 1877, there was an epidemic of diphtheria. My grandmother lost seven children, two of her own and several others. Out of eight, my mother was the only one who survived... and always had a delicate throat.

William Robinson was eight years old when his parents died. He was taken by his godfather, a Scotch-English sea captain, and grew up on the seven seas. He had a meager education, but could read the Bible and spout long speeches from Shakespearean plays. He was very proud of his stepchildren, James and Clara Logan. My mother's half-brother and sister -- very brilliant in their studies and dramatic readings (called "elocution" in those days). My mother, Laura, was excellent in arithmetic, kept her father's books and cashiered in the summer months. She also was an excellent pianist. (More to that later.) My grandmother sent her children to an academy run by a German who gave them an excellent education for that time, in this little town. For Clara Logan, the oldest sister, the time came to go to college. She was to be sent down to Mills [but] my grandfather became ill.



LS: Her Uncle [her father's brother] Dick, as we always called him, Pleasant Dixon Logan (across the river) arranged for Clara to take the examination for a school teacher. So for a number of years she taught a country school across the river from Red Bluff. (That's how it happened that she missed diphtheria -- because she was not near it.) As time went on, Clara had visited San Francisco and Sacramento and was impressed with the styles. My grandmother sent her to Sacramento to study and work with a modiste and designer. Later she met the handsome Albert Frazier in San Francisco. They married in Red Bluff, attended by the town's elite, Black and White. (There were only a handful of Blacks there at the time.)

They settled in San Francisco as Albert was a waiter in the Palace Hotel. Some year later, the group of handsome young men, the Colored waiters, were replaced with White help. Albert found work in the Grand Hotel nearby. They bought a lot and built a cottage on Baker Street. People wondered why they would settle so far out in the sand dunes. [However] it was not long before the city grew far beyond it.

When Albert Frazier was a little fellow in Virginia, he said about nine years old -- apparently his mother and the new baby had been sold and -- he rushed down wanting to go with them, screaming "Mama, Mama, Mama." Of course, he was covered with dust as the horses went on. Nobody paid any attention to him. She [his mother] was sitting there holding the baby in the wagon and they went on, of course, until they were completely out of sight. Well, then, he was lost.

He didn't know how to get back, and didn't want to go back anyway. So he trudged along for two or three days. Peaches were ripe, so he fed himself on peaches and slept in haystacks. It was hot weather and he managed, soon arriving at a camp of soldiers. This was during the Civil War. Albert knew... saw by the blue coats... that they were Union men. So he trudged in there starving and filthy -- and stumbled into the tent of a young Jewish officer. The officer took one look at him, felt sorry for the boy, fed him and cleaned him up somehow. So he attached himself. He made himself exceptionally useful, polished his boots... he did everything. He knew what to do to make himself liked. He became his little errand boy and helper.

JW: What was this officer's name?

LS: I don't know... I wish I knew.

The War was over after a while and he took him home with him to Denver where his family lived. They always teased him... Now this Lutie Gilbert that I tell you about... [Lutie] Coleman... her mother was a beautiful young girl there in Denver. They always used to tease my uncle, because they said he went to synagogue on Saturday and they sent him to the Methodist church on Sunday. I thought that was so cute.

But, anyway... he always observed Jewish holidays. We had matzohs and we had certain foods that he would prepare. He never did explain too much about it, but I've realized... since I've grown up, I realized that those were Jewish foods that were done on special occasions. He liked to cook. Certain Sundays he was home and he would prepare these big meals and had a lot of fun doing it.



- LS: They [hotel managers] collected these young men from the Mid-West. They were tall and handsome... and the managers stocked the newly built Palace Hotel with them. They [the waiters] made quite an impression. Because these were upstanding young men -- young men with quality. Everyone of them amounted to something as time went on. And then, of course, the unions come in and they disposed of the Colored help.
- JW: Did Albert Frazier ever see his mother and sister?
- LS: Never! Never!
- JW: After the War was over he never tried to...?
- LS: Never had the slightest idea where in the world they were. The same thing happened to some relatives of ours: My grandmother's mother died. She was very ill for a long, long time. Then she died. Her husband, my grandmother's father, Taft Logan, took the name, William Pettit; he went out to Texas... he married and he went on out to Texas, or possibly he went to Texas and he married out there. However, as time went on, my father's sister was in Washington, D.C., visiting, and met a very charming lady. They got to chatting, and she said my father's always wondered what became of this woman named Minerva and his other daughters, Pauline and Cynthia. As they talked, she said, "Why, I know who those are. My brother is married to the daughter, [of Minerva Logan Robinson] Laura Robinson. So then she contacted us. That was during the 1915 Exposition in San Francisco. She came and visited us for about a month, and later we met another daughter of that same family in Los Angeles. She came by and stayed with us a little while in San Francisco. (There was something I was going to tell you, but it slipped [my mind]-- shucks.) (Chuckle)
- JW: I think we'll stop here, because...

..... END TAPE



## BEGIN TAPE 3:4:2 (FOURTH SESSION - NOVEMBER 22, 1978)

JW: This is basically a reading of unpublished stories Mrs. Scott has written about Albert Frazier and other of her ancestors' experiences in the East and on the way West

LS: Albert Frazier and his wife, Clara Logan, bought a little... a lot out on Baker Street, way out in the "sand dunes," so they called it. The main streetcar -- kind of a cable car at that time -- stopped, oh, several blocks away, around Fillmore -- what I guess is now Fillmore -- and then you took a horse car. You got off and got onto this car propelled by a horse, and they'd stop and you'd get off and go home. (And so (Chuckle) people can hardly realize about that sort of thing because it was so long ago.)

Eventually the unions made such a fuss about Colored men -- they wanted White men to be working at the Palace. So the maids, both the women and the men who worked there, were dismissed and replaced by White people, maids and all. But he did get a job and worked for many years at the nearby Grand Hotel. As life went on, they remodeled that cottage that they had built. And my father came up from San Jose, and from that time on we lived in San Francisco. They built this three-story home. We had a residence upstairs, two stories, and rented the lower flat. We lived there for the rest of their lives.

JW: They never had children?

LS: They never had children. But they were wonderful to everybody else's children. My aunt was very brilliant [with a] sparkling personality -- "charisma" they call it, you know. She had all that. She formed little clubs among the younger children, taught them to sew and do little things. Then later on she became interested in her pet charity, this old folks home out in Beulah. (Was that near Stege?) Well, anyway, it was out of town... out of [what was then] Oakland.

JW: I think it's where the Mills College Campus is now.

LS: I don't know. It was very hard to get to. But, anyway, that was her pet interest. So she gave little plays and entertainments, and the proceeds went to that organization. I don't know how they existed, because, you know, the little money you pay to enter is long since dispelled. But, anyway, a lot of people lived there, quite a number of people.

JW: This was the old folks home?

LS: Old folks home at Beulah.

JW: And this was for Colored people only?

LS: Yes. Yes.



JW: He was nine years old when he was separated from his mother, Albert Frazier?

LS: Yes.

JW: What state did this happen in?

LS: Virginia.









